

HOUSE BILL 1101

By Shaw

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 8;  
Title 9 and Title 49, relative to enhancing the high-  
need workforce in rural and underserved counties.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapter 4, is amended by adding  
the following as a new part:

**49-4-1101.**

This part is known and may be cited as the "Rural Renewal Award Act."

**49-4-1102.**

The purpose of this part is to alleviate the burden of student loan debt and attract  
qualified workers to parts of this state experiencing population loss or a shortage of  
skilled workers.

**49-4-1103.**

As used in this part:

(1) "Department" means the department of education;

(2) "Eligible county" means a county that:

(A) Has experienced a net population decline over the most  
recent seven-year period for which information is available; or

(B) Has experienced the highest net population loss in this state  
over the most recent ten-year period for which information is available;

(3) "GED®" means a general educational development credential  
awarded by a state-approved institution or organization;

(4) "High-need field" means a field experiencing a shortage of qualified applicants in rural or underserved communities, including, but not limited to, teaching, nursing, dentistry, or primary care; and

(5) "HiSET®" means the High School Equivalency Test credential awarded by a state-approved institution or organization.

**49-4-1104.**

(a) The department shall administer a financial award program for applicants who are employed in high-need fields within eligible counties. To be eligible for a financial award under this program, an applicant must:

(1) Have graduated from high school or obtained a GED® or HiSET®;

(2) Have graduated and earned an undergraduate degree or certificate from a college or university, apply for this program within five (5) years of obtaining such degree or certificate, and provide proof of the applicant's hourly wage or salary;

(3) Participate in a federal income-driven repayment plan; and

(4) Reside in an eligible county and work in a high-need field in this state, if employed.

(b) The department, in consultation with the commissioner of economic and community development, shall publicly identify high-need fields and eligible counties. On or before January 1, 2022, and on January 1 of each subsequent year, the department shall publish a list of high-need fields and eligible counties in this state where residents may be eligible for a financial award under this section.

(c) The department shall assist counties to publicize this program to potential applicants.

(d) An applicant whose annual income is less than fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000) is eligible to receive an award under this program equal to one hundred percent (100%) of the applicant's monthly federal income-driven repayment plan payments for twenty-four (24) months of repayment under the federal program. The awards granted under this section must be deferred for a recipient who has been granted a deferment or forbearance under the federal income-driven repayment plan. Upon completion of the deferment or forbearance period, the recipient is eligible to receive an award for the remaining time period under this subsection (d).

**49-4-1105.**

A recipient who is not a resident of an eligible county or otherwise does not meet the eligibility criteria established under this part at the time a payment is made under this part shall refund the payments to the state. The department may recover the payments in accordance with rules promulgated by the department.

**49-4-1106.**

An applicant who is delinquent or in default on a repayment or service obligation under any federal family education loan program, a student loan guaranteed or administered by the state, or any other state or federal educational loan or service-conditional scholarship program or has failed to comply with the terms of a service condition imposed by an award made pursuant to this title or has failed to repay an award shall not receive an award under this program until the delinquency, default, or failure is cured.

**49-4-1107.** The department is authorized to promulgate rules in accordance with the Uniform Administrative Procedures Act, compiled in title 4, chapter 5, necessary to effectuate this program.

SECTION 2. For purposes of promulgating rules, this act takes effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it. For all other purposes, this act takes effect January 1, 2022, the public welfare requiring it.